

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Toshio Yasumatsu, 86, retired dry cleaner

*"I came to Waikīkī since there was someone here I knew. Since I couldn't just play around, I took a job at the Moana Hotel. After three, perhaps four, months the strike was over. Since the strike was over and since the pay was so great, especially with the bonuses, we decided to go back to Waipahu instead of staying in Honolulu."*

Toshio Yasumatsu, Japanese, was born in February 1900. The youngest of four, he farmed and received his elementary education in Hiroshima-ken, Japan. He left Japan in 1917, arriving in Honolulu in 1918 to celebrate O-shōgatsu, or New Year's.

He worked hāpai kō at Waipahu from 1918 to 1922, except for a brief stint as a Moana Hotel pantry worker during the 1920 sugar strike. He returned to Waikīkī in 1922 when he worked for the Kapiolani Clothes Cleaner Shop--a shop that he eventually bought and operated from 1927 to 1948.

He and his wife, Taka, lived in Waikīkī for over twenty-five years. An avid golfer, he frequents the Ala Wai Golf Course.

Tape No. 13-3-1-85 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Toshio Yasumatsu (ToY)

and

Taka Yasumatsu (TaY)

February 26, 1985

Kapahulu, O'ahu

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

[Note: Interview conducted in Japanese. Translation done by Judith Yamauchi.]

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Toshio Yasumatsu on February 26, 1985 at his home in Kapahulu, Honolulu, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Michi Kodama-Nishimoto.

What was your mother's name?

ToY: It was Kodama Masa.

MK: And your father's name?

ToY: Soichi.

MK: When were you born?

ToY: On February 15 of the 33rd year of Meiji [1900].

MK: Where were you born?

ToY: In Hiroshima. It was a place called Jinseki-gun, Fukunaga.

MK: What number child were you?

ToY: I was the fourth.

MK: How many children were there in all?

ToY: There were [six] but my younger brother died when he was little so that left [five]. There were three boys and. . . . No, there were four boys and one girl. My younger brother died but there were four boys.

MK: What was the name of your mura [village]?

ToY: It was a place called Fukunaga-mura.

MK: What sort of place was Fukunaga-mura?

ToY: It was in the mountains where there were only farmers.

MK: How many houses were there?

ToY: Let me see. I think there must have been about fifteen or sixteen small houses. Perhaps not even that many. There was a small kumi [neighborhood group] there. Ours was called Nishi-gumi. There was one kumi after another there.

MK: What kind of houses were there in your village?

ToY: There were fine houses with tile roofs for the wealthy, but most of the usual people had thatched roofs. Some had a combination of tiled and thatched roofs with tile on the lower part and straw over the second floor. Those are things of the past.

MK: What sort of house was the Kodama house?

ToY: Ours was thatched. We had a long family line. In the old days, people always said shōyuya, shōyuya but it wasn't a place where they produced shōyu. A shōyuya [shōya] was someone who was a headman of a kumi. In the old days we had some assets, but my father liked to drink so. . . . (Laughs) He drank it all away. So we became poor.

MK: What sort of work did your mother and father do?

ToY: They were farmers.

MK: What sorts of things did they cultivate?

ToY: During the summer it was tobacco. Tobacco is something which is planted in the spring and it lasts almost until about September. We would pick each leaf and string it through a rope and then dry it. After it is dried, we would smooth out each tobacco leaf. We would then separate them according to color and put them into bunches of about twenty leaves each. After they were thus separated by color, about New Year's time, we would hand it over to the government. They would decide on the price and pay us. It was difficult [growing tobacco] in those days since we had to deal with the government. Then it was time to grow rice. We would grow the seedlings in the spring and harvest them in the fall. So we had tobacco and rice and. . . . Early in the fall we would plant wheat and by May or June of the following year, it would have matured. We planted tobacco between the wheat plants. Since tobacco matures more quickly, we would plant it before we harvested the wheat.

MK: So you had three types [of crops].

ToY: That's right. And in the old days if we had even a little room we would plant buckwheat as well as soy beans and azuki [red beans]. Seasonally where ever there was room we would plant these things here and there and harvest them in the fall.

MK: Did you keep chickens or cattle?

ToY: Yes, we had cattle. I don't remember about chickens but we had cattle for plowing the fields. In order to plow the fields we kept cattle.

MK: What about vegetables?

ToY: We usually had a vegetable garden in the small sections of the fields. We would seasonally plant lettuce and things for ourselves to eat. In Japan there was no such thing as buying these things and eating them. In the country we all grew them and ate them. This is probably true even today. It's just that things are more convenient now--with all the nice new roads and everything. Even with all the luxuries, they still grow their own vegetables.

MK: Were the Kodama land holdings large or small?

ToY: We used to have dry fields and rice paddies, but, as I mentioned earlier, my father liked to drink so he lost it all. We did have a mountain, though. But as far as the fields were concerned what we had left was . . . just a trifle. We had to work other people's lands. In the old days, one tan [about 0.25 acres] of land yielded about six or seven hyō [bags] of rice. After we grew up, they started improving the soil by putting in fertilizer and various things. After that the rice yields increased greatly so that we were able to get ten hyō of rice from one tan of land. One hyō holds three masu [measuring container holding one to, about four gallons]. We could harvest about ten of these hyō of rice. [That was] in the old days. After we harvested it, we would have to take about half of it to the owners's place and give it to him. What remained was ours.

MK: When you were a boy, did you help your parents with the work?

ToY: Yes, yes.

MK: How did you help them?

ToY: When I was young, I would take care of the younger ones. When I was older--about eleven--I would help with the rice planting and grass cutting. During the summer we had to cut grass for the cattle. Farming in Japan takes up all your time--at night is about the only time you have some leisure. In the fall there would be tobacco, so at night we would have to smooth out the leaves one by one. I used to help with that. My hands would



become black from the tar from the tobacco.

MK: Was this throughout the year?

ToY: Through the fall and winter. It [tobacco] was collected about New Year's time. It was separated by color and. . . . It was a pain in those days--working with the government. These days government is so simple. Even today, they are still growing tobacco [in Japan] at our hometown because the price is so good, and because it's not difficult. It's easy so they've continued with it. In the old days, it was already decided exactly how much you could plant per unit of area. If you planted even one extra one, they would complain. So we hated growing tobacco because the government was so picky. But farmers didn't have any other income, so they grew tobacco in order to have money for the New Year's. If you grew rice on someone else's land, as I mentioned before, you would have to give the owner half of it and the rest you would have to eat, so there was no rice to sell. For the wealthy, they only take it in, so they would have plenty of rice to sell and could live in luxury. Poor people would have to do all the work and give over half of it away.

MK: It certainly was difficult in those days.

ToY: Yes, it was.

MK: You mentioned that when you were a child you went to school. How many years did you go?

ToY: I only went to the sixth grade. Since my parents were poor . . . . They couldn't so readily send me to school since they needed me to help with the farm work.

MK: So you went to school for six years and what sorts of courses did they offer in those days?

ToY: First of all, they had lessons on morals. Besides morals, there was reading and writing and history and geography. In Japan in order to practice Chinese characters, we would write them in Chinese ink. Instead of using new paper, we would practice them on old newspapers--because we didn't have money to buy new paper.

MK: Among these courses did you have one you liked the best or the least?

ToY: I disliked history the most. The history course in the old days was all about the emperor and it was boring and I hated that period. I enjoyed geography. They would teach geography by showing us maps of various areas and that was fun.

MK: What were the teachers like in those days?

ToY: As I remember them they weren't that arrogant--they were kind. In the old days teachers were usually arrogant, but mine were all kind.

The principal was a little older but the rest were in their thirties. They were young.

MK: At school during play period what sorts of games did you play with your friends?

ToY: Let me see. There was this game in which you used a round cardboard piece--what was that called now? You would throw it. . . . At the other person's. . . . Pitch?

MK: Was it a top?

ToY: I don't remember what it was called. They were round pieces of paper--you would deal the pieces to four or five people one at a time and take turns trying to turn the other's over; and if you won, you would take it for your own. There was a frontside and a backside to them. You would take your own and throw it next to the other's--it flips over with the wind.

MK: It's made out of paper?

ToY: A round, paper thing. They sold them in the stores. Since it was the old days, they were very cheap. That was about seventy-five or eighty years ago, since I'm eighty-five now. [ToY is probably referring to a game which was called maruken in the Hiroshima area and called menko in the Tokyo area.]

MK: Other than this what else did you do?

ToY: Other than that there wasn't much we played at school. . . . Maybe just onigokko [tag]. Oh, yes, we had exercise bars, so those who liked exercise played on these.

MK: When you were small, what did you hope to be when you grew up? Did you have any hopes?

ToY: I didn't have anything like that. Not in the country. Since we were so poor, there were times when I wanted to become rich. In those days I really didn't have any particular aspirations.

MK: Your father passed away when you were about thirteen or fourteen. What happened as a result of your father's passing away?

ToY: My oldest brother had already come here to Hawai'i. The second one was working in a temple hoping to become a priest. When my father passed away, he had to leave the temple and come home to work in the fields--since I was still only about fourteen. So all the brothers worked on the farm. In the old days in the country there really wasn't anything else to do. Nothing except farming.

MK: For what reason did you come to Hawai'i?

ToY: We were poor and my mother said to us that she didn't have any assets

to give us; so she would go to Hawai'i first and then send for us. She came about one year before us. I was about seventeen. It was my older brother who already lived here who first sent for my mother. Then after my mother was here, she had the right to send for us children according to the government's rules. My older brother and I came together on the same ship.

MK: When did you arrive in Hawai'i?

ToY: On January 14 or 15, 1918. When we arrived, they told us they would roast some New Year's mochi and let us eat some.

MK: What was the name of your ship?

ToY: I think it was the Siberia Maru. There was a Siberia Maru.

MK: What was the boat trip like?

ToY: It was full of young people coming to Hawai'i. Boat trips in those days--I got seasick. Due to seasickness, I slept all the time. I never went outside to walk around because I was so seasick. There were a lot of people in those days who came by being sent for. The year after I came I think it got so that people couldn't send for others anymore.

MK: What happened when you arrived in Hawai'i at the Immigration Office?

ToY: When we went into the Immigration Office, there was an inspector, and we were able to go out right away. We got into a hack and rode over to the Onomichiya [a hotel]. In a hack. (Laughs) Now that I think of it, at that time I felt like it was a long ride, but now I realize that it's very short from there to the Onomichiya which was on Beretania [Street]. By hack. In those days there were quite a few cars--taxis. When I went home to Waipahu, I went by car. My older brother lived in Waipahu so I went up to Waipahu.

MK: Where in Waipahu?

ToY: We just kept referring to it as Down Below Camp when we first came. It was just below the mill. There was a shabby house next to the rice paddy. It had two stories. My mother had gone there. Before I came my oldest brother's wife came. After my brother's wife came, my mother came, and then we [ToY and his older brother] came. That's right, the wife came first.

MK: What was the size of this house?

ToY: It was small. There was perhaps one room upstairs and two rooms downstairs and a kitchen. It's something of the past. That's where we lived.

MK: What about the ofuro? Where was it?

ToY: The ofuro was next to the house.

MK: After coming to Hawai'i and seeing the sugar cane for the first time, what did you think?

ToY: Let me see. How many days did we rest? It must have been about two weeks that we rested after we arrived here. My oldest brother had been doing hāpai kō which is carrying the sugar cane on your shoulders and loading it, so he told us to do hāpai kō too. So my older brother and I and my oldest brother and his wife--the four of us would do hāpai kō. People used to say that with the four of us all doing hāpai kō, we would be the top moneymakers. In the old days they didn't have paper money--just gold pieces. Only twenty dollar gold pieces or ten dollar or five dollar ones. They didn't have paper money in the old days.

MK: When you did hāpai kō, was it by contract?

ToY: No. You got paid by how many tons you loaded onto the car. At the mill there is a scale; and when it is put on this, they determine how many tons you've got. Each person has a bangō from the plantation and they put that on the side of the car they've loaded. There's a place to put your bangō on the side of the car. They look at this bangō and record that such and such a person brought in this number of tons. Although I did the work and had a little pocket money, I never saw the money [I had earned]. My oldest brother would go to the Chinese camp and gamble. After he received the money, he would go over there and spend it all. We would only get a small allowance, and he would gamble [the rest]. That was about it in the old days.

MK: If that's the case, how did you eat?

ToY: Oh my oldest brother gave us enough money to eat. You make good money by doing hāpai kō. But he would take this and go gamble with it.

MK: In those days when you did hāpai kō, were there people of other ethnic backgrounds working with you?

ToY: The people who did hāpai kō were only the Japanese. Even the luna was Japanese. . . . For hāpai kō. For pulling the loaded sugar cane, although there were Japanese, there were also Puerto Ricans. There was a large stable where they kept a lot of horses and early in the morning they would take these horses to the cane fields. The loaded sugar cane was pulled by horses to the main track, but these tracks were brought only to the front, and what they loaded on to the trains was what the horses had brought out.

MK: What was this hāpai kō work like?

ToY: There was a thick two-by-twelve inch piece of lumber on which they had nailed pieces of wood about a foot apart so that you wouldn't

slip on it--this is what we walked on as we carried a load of sugar cane onto the car. The sugar cane was full of thorns and they would get stuck onto my hands like hair; but when I tried to remove them like this, I would be scolded. They would say, "what are you doing--just rub them. Then they'll get well." See how soft my hands were when I had just come from Japan? And to have them pricked by the sugar cane--they are on the leaves--just touching them--I guess they are on the root of the plant. Just touching them, your hands would get covered with the [thorns] just like hair growing there, until they were white. So when I would be picking them off one at a time they would scold me and say just rub them together like this. Hāpai kō is really hard work.

MK: When you weren't working what kinds of things did you do?

ToY: When we weren't working was every twenty days and we would just go home and sleep. There was no such thing as playing at night.

MK: On April 26, 1918 you got married, didn't you?

ToY: Yes, just about a year later [i.e., after arrival in the Islands] I got married.

MK: What was your wife's name?

ToY: It was Taka. Yasumatsu Taka.

MK: How did you happen to get married?

ToY: A friend of this family had been looking around for a yōshi [adopted son-in-law]. They must have become aware of the news of my brother and my arrival. And they came to ask for me. I didn't feel any reluctance about any of this. I had said that if there were a nice girl I would be glad to go. Then everything just happened naturally. What month was that anyhow? I guess it was in April.

TaY: April 26.

ToY: She says April 26. We got married in April.

MK: Leave it up to the wife to remember the wedding date.

(Laughter)

ToY: I wouldn't remember such things.

MK: In 1920 there was a strike. What happened as a result of the strike?

ToY: Since they said they didn't know when it [i.e., strike] would end, I came out to Honolulu. After leaving for Honolulu, I came to Waikīkī since there was someone here I knew. Since I couldn't just play around, I took a job at the Moana Hotel. After three,

perhaps four months the strike was over. Since the strike was over and since the pay was so great, especially with the bonuses, we decided to go back to Waipahu instead of staying in Honolulu. After we went back and started working again, then naturally. . . . The pay--well it was better than before thanks to the strike. Nonetheless, it was still a small amount.

MK: During the strike, when you worked at the Moana [Hotel], what type of work did you do?

ToY: I worked in the pantry. We worked with such things as cakes, pies, ice cream, cocktails, etc.

MK: Had you ever done such work before?

ToY: No, but there was a person there from Yamaguchi-ken who would teach me. He would tell me to do this and that. . . . Cut pineapples in such and such a way and I would just cut them as he told me. The work was easy. If they told us that today the ice cream would be such and such, they would bring it over and, for instance, if they wanted strawberry and vanilla that day, you just had to bring it up. If there were any leftovers, they didn't use it the next day. In the old days, since they didn't use it the next day, they would put the round ice cream containers which hold three or four gallons into a washtub and pour hot water over them. They throw [the ice cream] away. They told us we could take it home if we wanted it so we would put it in boxes and take it home. Every day they had different flavors, such as today is strawberry and vanilla and the following day is chocolate and something else, so they all had these leftovers. And all the leftovers were thrown away. It really was luxurious in those days at the Moana Hotel.

MK: What sorts of people stayed at the Moana Hotel in those days?

ToY: In those days only fairly wealthy people came. A Japanese person was the head of the dining room. His name was Kimura. In order to get a good table, the wealthy customers would give him tips. The tips given in those days by the wealthy were five dollar gold pieces so. . . . For the rich Haoles who gave him a good tip, he would put them at a good table with a nice view. For cheap people who wouldn't spend money he would put them in noisy areas. In the old days that's how it was. Even today, it's like that in hotels. If you spend money, you can go to good spots. That's how it is.

MK: Do people who work in the pantry get their share of the tips?

ToY: Not at all. They don't get any so. . . . Waiters make money though. If an order for, say, a papaya comes in, if they give us a quarter or fifty cents, we would give him [the waiter] a good papaya. To waiters who don't give us tips, we give green ones which a spoon won't even go into. When they ask us for a better one and they put out a quarter, then we will. People tend to become a little devious. I was there for about three or four months. But I went



back to Waipahu because there was work and the money was better.

MK: In those days were the waiters and room maids of the Moana Hotel Japanese?

ToY: They were all Japanese in those days. People who cleaned the rooms were all Japanese.

MK: Could they do such work even if they only spoke Japanese?

ToY: That was really difficult. These days, waiters and waitresses all write everything down when they meet with the customers. In the old days this wasn't the case. Whether there were five or six customers at a table, the waitress would have to remember all the separate orders in her head. That's really tough. That's how they did the ordering. And these Japanese would take everything to the right people without making any mistakes. That was quite admirable. These days, even when they write it down, when they bring the order to you they ask if yours was the beef or the pork chops etc. That's how easy it is now. In the old days, nobody asked such things. They kept everything in their heads. They were remarkable people--those waiters in the old days.

MK: When you worked at the Moana Hotel, did you ever live in one of their cottages?

ToY: Cottages? That area where that big hotel, the Princess Ka'iulani, is standing--that area used to be all cottages belonging to the Moana Hotel. I believe they were all two-storied. I used to go there to get the laundry, but I believe they were all two-storied.

When the room boy, called me, I used to go get the laundry that the guests had put out for him. The room boys were all Japanese then. They cleaned the rooms.

MK: Where did you live during those three months?

ToY: In Waikiki, off Paoakalani [Avenue] and just inside 'Ōhūa Avenue, there was an old house. There was a camp there where Japanese had lived for a long time.

MK: What was the name of the camp?

ToY: I don't believe there was a name for the camp. The camp which belonged to Asuka-san was called Asuka Camp, but this was closer to town. There was no name for this camp.

TaY: This is because each person had his own cottage. And there was a taxi stand in front. When people called for a car they would go out. It's on this side of St. Augustine Church on the Diamond Head side of 'Ōhūa [Avenue].

MK: So it was in the area of the taxi stand and the church that you lived.

TaY: There were two rows of cottages. There was a front and back. Next door to us was Murakami-san and in front was Yoshimura-san and Takashige-san.

MK: So your neighbors were Murakami-san and Takashige-san and Yoshimura-san. When you compare this cottage with the Waipahu house, how was it?

ToY: When we lived in Waipahu, that was a good house too. We had a parlor and a bedroom and kitchen. The Waikiki cottage also had a kitchen. . . . Well, the house in Waikiki was a little older.

TaY: It was a two-room house, with a living room and a kitchen.

MK: So you worked at the Moana [Hotel] for three or four months. And after you went back to the plantation, you again came back to Waikiki.

TaY: He [a laundry owner] was looking for a worker for his laundry.

ToY: He needed a worker so I went there.

MK: When you came here after he had said he needed a worker, what did he tell you?

ToY: He needed someone and since I was young, he seemed to be delighted that I had come. But from about that time, I even worked nights.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: What was the name of this laundry?

ToY: It was called Kapi'olani Clothes Cleaners and it had been in existence for a long time. A person named Yanagitsubo owned it. That's where I started working and learning [the trade].

MK: What was the pay in those days?

ToY: In the beginning it was twenty-five dollars a month.

MK: What sort of work did you do at this Kapi'olani Clothes Cleaners shop? I know it was laundry work, but could you explain it to me a little?

ToY: The first thing I learned was how to wash pants and things. There are some trousers which are badly soiled. We would set a one-by-twelve inch board on a washtub filled with water and soak the pants in the water. At first we would put soap on the pants and wash them. After we washed them, we would put some water on them and



we could tell at a glance whether or not the spots were gone. At the beginning you can't tell because the whole thing is so dirty. After you work for a while, you can tell immediately when you dampen it whether it's been washed well or not.

MK: So you learned this first. Then what did you learn?

ToY: After that it was ironing. I learned how to iron the wrinkled inside parts of the trousers. After that--in those days we already had a steam presser . . .

TaY: That person [Yanagitsubo] was the first person to get that machine.

ToY: Yes, he bought it from America. After I learned to iron the inside parts, I learned how to use the machine. We would wash the clothes in the afternoon and then we would iron the inside parts and then from about three o'clock we would iron it with the machine. Then I would eat dinner and after that I would work again. I did the work of two people for him.

MK: How many workers were there?

ToY: [ToY mishears question.] I worked until 1927. That was five years--no six years--it was about five years. Yes, that's right, about five years. That person said he had earned money so he was going back [to Japan]. After that he handed it [the business] over to me.

MK: In those days what sort of customers did you have?

ToY: The customers were mainly from Kāhala or Mānoa. They were all good customers.

MK: What was the price for having a pair of pants washed in those days?

ToY: Let me see.

MK: In the beginning, when you were working there.

ToY: How much was it for a pair of pants? (ToY asks his wife, TaY.)

TaY: One suit cost seventy-five cents.

ToY: Pants cost thirty-five cents. The coat cost forty cents.

TaY: After a while, it went up to one dollar.

MK: Could you finish in one day? How many days did it take you from the time you received the laundry?

ToY: We'd go around to pick it up from our customers on Monday. On Thursday morning we'd go around to deliver it to our customers. At that time if we receive other clothes, we'd deliver it on Monday

when we went for our pickup.

MK: Then it was already set, wasn't it?

ToY: Yes, it was prearranged by word of mouth.

MK: In about 1927, the Kapi'olani Clothes Cleaner shop was handed over to you, since that man [i.e., Yanagitsubo] was going to Japan. How much did you pay for it?

ToY: Was it \$3,000? [ToY asks his wife TaY.]

TaY: Do you mean in order to get the shop? It was \$2,500.

ToY: It was \$2,500.

TaY: We paid \$2,000 cash and \$500 by means of a tanomoshi [a private mutual financing association], which they had in the old days, because they asked us to. So we brought the \$500 from the tanomoshi home and paid them.

MK: So you paid \$2,000 cash and \$500 by means of a tanomoshi.

ToY: Paying \$2,500 in those days meant it was a good laundry. Most of them wouldn't even cost \$1,000 in the old days.

MK: Where was this Kapi'olani Clothes Cleaner shop?

ToY: It was 2550 Kalākaua Avenue. The numbers there have since changed.

TaY: It was 2548. The number of houses increased so it became 2550.

MK: So in the beginning it was 2548 Kalākaua Avenue.

ToY: Yes.

MK: And from 1927 to 1935 you ran the clothes cleaner shop in the old building.

ToY: Yes, in the old building.

MK: How was the business there when you bought it?

ToY: It didn't get to be any less. It increased as the population increased. Through word of mouth from friends, we had a fair amount of business. Enough so that we even had to work at night.

MK: How many people did you use in those days?

ToY: About that time was it two people? (ToY asks TaY.)

TaY: Three.

ToY: Was it three? Was it three people we employed?

MK: Every day did you yourself do the cleaning?

ToY: Oh yes. I had to do the boss's work very hard.

MK: What sort of work did your wife do?

ToY: The woman's job was to answer the telephone.

TaY: He [husband] did all the women's dresses and things. The workers did the men's things. All the difficult women's things he did himself.

MK: So your husband did the women's clothes and the workers did the men's clothes.

ToY: I did all the ironing of the women's dresses and things.

TaY: In those days there were a lot of pleats, and he would pin each one by hand and iron them.

MK: So he did all the pleats by hand.

ToY: I would pin all of them by hand. It goes pretty fast--once you get used to it.

MK: What do you mean by fast?

ToY: In order to fold the pleats, you already have it somewhat pleated from before, so you just follow the original fold and it comes out beautifully. It isn't like pleating them from scratch. So it's not that difficult a thing to do.

TaY: Since they are dry-cleaned, the chemical solvent retains the folds, and [it's not like] washing them with water.

ToY: Since they are not washed with water--usually the dresses are washed in chemical solvent. We have cleaning fluid which we put into the machines.

MK: Did your wife also help out there?

ToY: Yes. She had to repair all the pockets and torn places on the pants and coats. They'd ask her to sew on buttons, etc.

TaY: They'd also ask to have things made larger or smaller.

ToY: She also did a lot of shirts. When I say shirt, I don't mean dress shirts, but aloha shirts. She would iron them or sew buttons on them or mend them. There was plenty of work.

MK: Were there any shops next door to the Kapi'olani Clothes Cleaners?

What was next door?

ToY: Mr. [Niro] Aoki's grocery store was next door. On the other side there was a . . .

TaY: Chinese laundry.

ToY: Oh yes, there was a Chinese laundry on one side. And then a taxi.

MK: Mr. Kuniyuki's taxi. There was a taxi stand.

TaY: That's where Frank Tatsumura [i.e., an acquaintance of MK] first worked driving a taxi.

ToY: Yes, he used to drive a taxi there.

TaY: Frank said that when he was small, he boarded at the Tohoku Ryokan and went to school from there.

MK: Were there any other stores?

ToY: Yes, there were many if you went [towards] Downtown [Honolulu]. In this area there was only Mr. Aoki's store next door and mine all the way to the park [i.e., Kapi'olani Park].

MK: What kind of stores were lined up [towards] Downtown?

ToY: A taxi and an ice cream parlor and a grocery . . .

TaY: [And] barbershop.

ToY: Oh, a barbershop and then a dressmaker. After that came the Okasago store.

TaY: After Mr. Okasago passed away, they sent for the son from Japan, but since he wouldn't [come], the wife sold it to Mr. Aoki and went back to Japan. After that Mr. Aoki moved [his business] from Paoakalani [Avenue] to 'Ōhua [Avenue]. In front of that place where there is now a bus stop on the other side of 'Ōhua [Avenue], there was a hotel called Roselawn. A hotel and a restaurant.

MK: There was a hotel?

ToY: It wasn't much of a hotel. It was two stories with a restaurant below. There's not even a picture of that anymore. I don't know where that picture I took of it went.

TaY: It wasn't Kūhiō beach yet but Kūhiō [i.e., Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole] lived there until he died.

MK: As your wife mentioned, Kūhiō lived there until he died. She said Prince Kūhiō lived in Waikīkī. Do you have any memories of Prince Kūhiō?

ToY: I used to take him his laundry but other than that I don't know anything.

MK: After Prince Kūhiō died, I understand there was a funeral procession along that area. Do you have any memories of that? Of Prince Kūhiō's funeral?

ToY: No, I don't.

TaY: Mrs. Shikada used to work there. Both husband and wife worked there. The Shikadas went to the funeral and were very saddened by it.

MK: I'll ask your husband now, but from 1927 to 1935 you were in that old building, and there were some Hawaiians who played music outside . . . . Can you tell us a little about that?

ToY: There were some Hawaiians but there were also some local Portuguese. In the evenings some of the young people would play their ukuleles and sing and dance hula.

TaY: The tourists would sit on the stone wall there and watch and give them money.

ToY: After the war [World War II] they wouldn't let them do that anymore.

TaY: After the war that area completely became a beach.

ToY: Everyone says they should let them do it. . . . Along the beach along where the rock wall is. They would sit along the stone wall and put all their energy into it and it was fun [watching them]. Anyone says that.

TaY: They were all young people with good voices.

MK: While this Kapi'olani Clothes Cleaners was still in the old building, where did you and your family live?

ToY: We lived behind the old building in a cottage behind the taxi [stand].

MK: Who were your neighbors?

ToY: Mr. [Niro] Aoki lived in the old house where he had his grocery. After he moved this way, toward 'Ōhūa [Avenue], we tore down our place and built a new one in 1935. We leased [the land] in 1933 and in 1935 rebuilt.

MK: So, in 1935, you erected a new building, and before that you leased the land. From where did you lease the land?

ToY: From Lili'uokalani Trust. Lili'uokalani was the queen. It was her land--most of the land in Waikīkī was hers. We leased it for

thirty years from Lili'uokalani.

MK: So you erected a new building in 1935. How did you build it--at that time?

ToY: What do you mean?

MK: I mean financially.

ToY: We had money. When I said I was going to build, Mr. Ibaraki [proprietor of Ibaraki Store] said he had no other place to go and asked me to go half with him. We decided to share in its building. It was three stories with a basement, the stores, and sleeping rooms upstairs. It cost \$10,200. That sure was cheap. That's because it was during the depression.

TaY: It wasn't tile but all concrete.

MK: So it was a concrete building. It was a fine building for those days. After you erected this new building, who came in besides Ibaraki Store?

ToY: There was Ibaraki and me and next door--what was that store now?

TaY: At the beginning it was a dry goods.

ToY: That's right. We ran the dry goods.

TaY: Together with Ibaraki we started a dry goods. Someone else asked for it so we handed it over to him. To a Mr. Fukumoto.

MK: To Mr. Fukumoto?

ToY: Yes.

MK: Were there any other people in that building?

ToY: That was all in the building that we erected.

MK: Did they build a new building next door as well?

ToY: Another laundry shop built it. It was called Banzai Clothes Cleaners.

(Laughter)

ToY: After the war started they changed the name to Kūhiō Cleaners.

MK: I guess they couldn't have a name like Banzai during the war.

ToY: Yes. They said Banzai Clothes Cleaners wouldn't make it.

MK: What was business like between 1935 and 1941--before the war?

ToY: Well, we were doing fine and the war started. After the war started, they wouldn't let us raise the prices. What do you call that?

TaY: It was the OPA [Office of Price Administration]. They made it so you couldn't raise the prices.

ToY: They made it so you couldn't raise the prices, but they also made it so you couldn't earn as much. You just had to work harder; what with the war on, more people would come from America.

TaY: A colonel who came from America would bring army uniforms to us and tell us to finish it by the next day or the day after and do it for a low price, etc. And we could only work until six o'clock because of the blackout.

ToY: We couldn't work at night.

TaY: Up until then we used to work until eleven [o'clock] every night.

MK: So, due to the war, the price was fixed and you couldn't work later than six o'clock.

TaY: Among our four young ones--one was in the hospital--so the remaining three worked as hard as they could--those I had reared since they were little.

MK: What was the Waikīkī area like after the war started? Was it dangerous . . .

ToY: No, nothing like that.

TaY: They were very strict about lights leaking out.

ToY: Since we were on the coastline, they would say that the lights could be seen from the outside. They would come pounding up the stairs--we were on the second floor. I couldn't figure out what we had done. Then they would tell us that light was leaking out from our house.

TaY: They would come just as we were tuning in to Japan on our short wave radio. We would have to quickly cover it with a plank and it would make this large noise. Then the police would come up.

MK: So you had a short wave?

ToY: Oh yes, in those days we had a short wave radio and we used to tune into Japan. We wondered what was going on so we tuned into Japan on the short wave.

TaY: I couldn't help it but this man would put his ear like this [up to the radio] and listen carefully.

MK: Weren't short wave radios forbidden in those days?



ToY: No, they weren't. They weren't forbidden. We would listen to the short wave and listen to the news of Japan.

MK: How did you feel being Japanese during the war?

ToY: We didn't receive any [abuse] from the foreigners. Even after the war started no one did anything to us. We used to say that this was not something that the civilians did, but something that the government did so it couldn't be helped. No one ever said anything like "goddamn Jap" to us.

MK: So you carried on your business as usual?

ToY: The business didn't change at all. We just had a lot of work.

TaY: When I did the cleaning for some soldiers, they would even bring me things we didn't have such as butter.

MK: So the soldiers brought you such things as butter?

ToY: Yes.

MK: After the war on April 1, 1946 there was a tidal wave. Could you say something about that?

ToY: There was a George Hara who was a post office head who lived next door to us. His son came over to us and said "Hey, Yasumatsu, Yasumatsu, the ocean salt water is going over the stone wall."

I said to him, "You can't fool me; I know today is April Fool's Day."

But when I went outside, it was terrible! When the tide went out, the shoreline could be seen, but as you're looking another gigantic wave would hit the stone wall. The wave would even reach the store's entrance. Was it ever frightening! That was more frightening than the war.

MK: Was the building all right?

ToY: The building was all right because the wall was there. What went over the wall would come rolling along the road. But the store was a little elevated like this. It wasn't level with the road. So it didn't come into the store, but it almost did.

TaY: At Harakawa-san's next door, below them was a river which had been blocked up and a hole developed in the river bank and through this hole the water poured into their basement.

MK: So your place was safer.

ToY: Yes, they should have stopped up the hole in the river. They hadn't plugged it up so the water went through that.



MK: I forgot to ask before but, do you remember when they created the Ala Wai Canal.

ToY: It was after we came out here--it was in 1923. We came out here in 1922 or 1923 and from then on they continually filled it in.

MK: Did anything happen to you in order to make the Ala Wai Canal. Did they say you couldn't stay here or . . .

ToY: No, there was nothing like that. They just dug along empty land. . . . Even along the river [i.e., Hamohamo Stream], since they were digging the canal the water didn't come this way. They just filled it all in.

MK: Did the water flow improve as a result of the creation of the Ala Wai Canal?

ToY: Oh yes. Since then there has been no such thing as flooding.

MK: I heard that the Chinese were doing some farming here before the Ala Wai Canal was created.

ToY: Yes, in the old days they had planted things and had even created a paddy.

TaY: They had rice paddies and they also kept ducks.

MK: They had rice paddies and kept ducks.

ToY: The Japanese had planted squash and (laughs) the Hawaiians stole them thinking they were watermelon.

TaY: That used to be a fairground [i.e., Territorial Fairgrounds].

ToY: There used to be a fairground there. There was a bridge so that you could cross it. There was a fairground before there was the golf course.

MK: Did you even go to the fairgrounds?

ToY: No, I've never gone.

MK: But, getting back to the discussion about the cleaners, did you run the cleaners until about 1948?

ToY: Yes.

MK: Why did you stop?

ToY: I was tired and someone who was working for us asked if we would sell it to him. But, I rented it to him and just sold him the business.

MK: Who did you sell it to?

ToY: To someone named Tomomitsu. He had been working for us all along.

MK: So [you gave him] all your customers?

ToY: Yes, all of them.

MK: By 1948 you had been living there for twenty years. What changed there during those twenty years? What changed the most?

ToY: I suppose what changed the most were the people. In the old days as we lived here on the second floor no matter where we went we never locked the door. There were no thieves at all before the war [World War II].

TaY: We would go camping from Saturday until Monday to Wai'anae or Waimānalo and sometimes clear to Kahuku--there was an old plantation in Kahalu'u--all our neighbors around us would go there. And we would camp there and even if we stayed there about two nights, there was never a time when we locked our house.

ToY: After the war, if you did something like that--it's a time when they would break in even if you have it locked. It's that different nowadays. These days people are so bad.

MK: Is that what has changed the most.

ToY: That's what's changed the most.

MK: Your wife mentioned that the people of Waikīkī got together and went camping. What other things did you all do together?

ToY: Well, not much . . .

MK: Such as at New Year's time.

ToY: Even at New Year's. . . . Well, we might drink with our friends. . . . After Aloha Kai was formed, we had some field days. [ToY asks TaY.] What year were those field days started? What year was Aloha Kai formed?

TaY: I don't remember.

ToY: After the people of Waikīkī formed the Aloha Kai, the members started having picnics.

MK: Why did they form the Aloha Kai?

ToY: For lack of a better name, they said let's use the word, "aloha." [Eisuke] Kuniyuki-san got the people together to form it. Kuniyuki-san became the president and formed it.

MK: Why did they create it?

ToY: Since they didn't have anything, the people of Waikīkī decided to form it for the sake of the community; so they got all the people

who lived in Waikīkī together and . . .

TaY: The dedication ceremonies for Aloha Kai was written up in the paper of May 25, 1931.

MK: So since 1931 on May 25. . . . That means for over fifty years they have had it every year. In your opinion, why have the members of the Waikīkī Aloha Kai met every year now for decades?

ToY: It's already set that every year they will have the New Year's Party and the picnic. They never fail to at least have these every year. If there's going to be a funeral, I would call five people on the telephone, and those five people in turn would call about four more people each. So people are informed very quickly by phone. If I call five people, then those five would call about four others; those five people calling four each would add up to twenty people, and about six or seven people are doing this--so it goes very quickly to let people know that somebody died.

TaY: At these times, to let the members know. At the funeral they would all gather.

MK: Did the Waikiki Aloha Kai have a tanomoshi?

ToY: No, they didn't.

TaY: By that time, they didn't use tanomoshis very much.

ToY: At the club they didn't have one. But other places, [they did]. It was something of the past to be asked to join a tanomoshi. I really took some losses by joining tanomoshis. It was during the depression and people would get so that they couldn't put their money in. There was a depression so people would borrow money, but when it came to paying it back, they couldn't get the money.

TaY: One person would get into six or seven of them, and it would be fine to get the money, but when it came time to pay into it, if business became bad they wouldn't be able to and that's when it would go broke.

ToY: You can't make any money in tanomoshis. People can't pay and it would go broke.

TaY: If there's a co-signer, then the co-signer would have to pay.

MK: So this Waikīkī Aloha Kai was for funerals and New Year's parties and picnics.

ToY: That's right.

MK: So you moved here to Monsarrat [Avenue] in about 1950.

ToY: Yes, we moved in here in 1950. After building it.

MK: Why did you move? Rather than staying in Waikīkī.

ToY: There's no longer any place to buy in Waikīkī. In those days during the war [World War II], there was a Hawaiian who lived in back who said to me, "Hey, how about buying my place?"

"How much?"

"Twenty thousand dollars."

"Too much money." I would tell him. I didn't buy and that was my mistake.

TaY: After the war started, the money that was in the bank was frozen. We couldn't take our money out, so we never could buy it.

ToY: That's right. After the war started, since I was an alien, it got so I couldn't take my money out. We didn't know it at the time, but if we had petitioned to get it out we could have.

TaY: If it weren't for that, we would have bought that place.

MK: But if you had bought that place, it would have since turned into a condominium or hotel.

ToY: In those days it certainly was cheap.

MK: You could have bought it for \$20,000?

ToY: That was no problem. Asuka-san's older brother used to have that place. In order to buy a small store on Vineyard, he said he would sell it; so the Asukas bought it. I guess they were lucky. Recently, in order to broaden the street, they said they were going to knock off one room. The other side paid for this and they received some money for the land. That was \$200,000. The late Mr. Asuka had said, "This must be a writing error. One digit is a mistake."

(Laughter)

ToY: When he said that to the boy, the boy said, "It's no mistake. It's no mistake that we're paying you this much for the land." He said he was astonished. For taking just a little of the front he was paid \$200,000. (Laughs) He was lucky.

TaY: In Waikīkī, one shaku [foot] costs over \$50.

MK: After having lived in Waikīkī for such a long time, what do you think of it?

ToY: I think Waikīkī has buildings that are too large. There's no use in erecting so many such buildings. They should have stopped with two or three stories as they did in the old days. But such large

buildings. . . . We used to watch them from here. But the tree has gotten so big that we can't see anymore.

MK: You reared four children there. What do you think of Waikīkī as a place to bring up children?

ToY: In the old days, to bring up children in Waikīkī was like bringing them up with money. The reason for this is that the parents were busy with the laundry and when the children came by to bother them, they would give them five cents. The parents would let the children buy things. However, Waikīkī didn't have any bad kids--they were all good boys. Even though they were brought up with money, they turned out to be good children.

MK: And all the mothers worked.

ToY: Yes, all the mothers, when they were working, would give their children five cents at a time so that they wouldn't bother them. Nonetheless, the children are all good.

TaY: There weren't any delinquents like they have now. They were all good boys.

ToY: There are four or five doctors among them.

TaY: The woman named Nakamura, after she was widowed, she sent all her six or seven children to the University [of Hawai'i], except for her oldest girl who just finished high school. They became teachers and such.

MK: She must have had a hard time. Compared to Japan, what do you think? After you came here from Hiroshima-ken, the fact that you continued staying here without going back.

ToY: Up until the war, I intended to go back after I earned some money. That was the problem. That's what's wrong with the Japanese. They should be like the Chinese who thought they should succeed here. The Japanese thought that when they earn a little bit of money they would go back to Japan and have it easy. The Chinese know that it's useless to go back to China, so they set down their roots at the place they've come. But until the war, we would just say, "let's go home, let's go home," and sent all our money back to Japan thinking that it would triple in value when it was converted to yen. So if you sent back \$10,000 it would become 30,000 yen. It turned into nothing after the war started. All that effort until then was like working hard for free. (Laughs)

MK: After the war ended, did you feel like going back to Japan?

ToY: No, not at all. I didn't have any inclination to do that. Until the war, I kept thinking I'd like to go back to Japan, and no matter what, it would be better to make money and go back to Japan. But after the war, I've felt that, instead of going back to that crowded

Japan, Hawai'i is the best place.

MK: So you felt that way until 1941.

ToY: All that effort until then [the fruits of] which I sent back to Japan before the war has turned into nothing. (Laughs) The 150,000 yen I sent to Japan before the war had turned into nothing. After the war when I went there, I found out that the 150,000 yen hadn't even earned any interest after the war but remained there just as it was. Finally, the other day, in May, I gave away the papers from that bank. I said, "Here, you can have them." They are useless. What could I do with 150,000 yen? In the old days in Japan, with 150,000 yen you could have bought considerable land before the war.

TaY: After the war when we went there to exchange it, they told us that if it were deposited in dollars, they could give it to us in dollars, but since it's in yen, this is all they could give us. Since nothing could be done about it, we told them we would leave it in and we just left it there.

ToY: We gave it away. After we worked so hard and sent it to Japan . . .

TaY: I guess we should just be happy that we have been able to live this long.

ToY: Those things happen during wartime.

TaY: In Japan as well, our family had quite a bit of property which we were having outsiders work, but that was all taken away. But my father, since he was kind, told his daughter-in-law before he died that, even though he had worked hard when he was young, he had bought that land as a hobby, so when she became old she should stop working and take it easy.

END OF INTERVIEW









# **WAIKĪKĪ, 1900 - 1985: ORAL HISTORIES**

## **Volume I**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
Social Science Research Institute  
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